

MRFA PDC Scholarship Series Session 3 - Notes

Engaging Students in Research

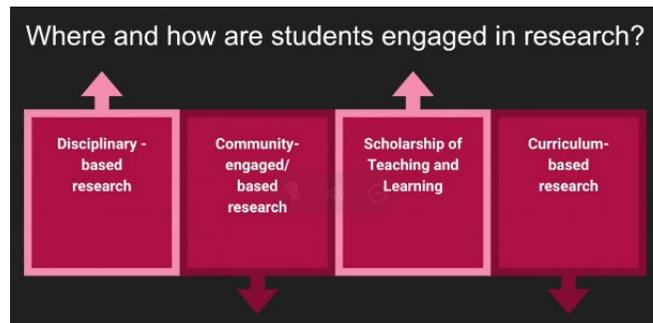
Hosted by Cherie Woolmer and Cari Merkley



Resources

- [Slide deck](#) from session
- [Resource Sheet](#) on Student Partnerships
- [Jamboard](#) from session discussion of benefits of student partnerships

Forms of Research Students are Engaged in



There are various types of research and scholarship that we are engaged in at Mount Royal University and, for Undergraduate students, there are various benefits from engaging them in research and scholarship

There are four broad domains where students are engaged in research:

- Disciplinary based research will vary significantly across departments and faculties
- Community based research is sometimes intrinsically connected to our disciplines and it is a necessary function of some students' scholarship but not at all for others'.
- Doing research with industry partners is also connected to this community-based research and it can overlap with curriculum-based research.

A student view.....

'Basic research competence takes time to develop and can be especially difficult for students starting out early in undergrad, as they are also adapting to university course loads and learning how to interact with faculty members in the classroom. Experiences can also vary widely depending on faculty attitudes and beliefs about how hierarchical things should be.

For undergrads, remembering that coursework is probably their priority and that research is a bonus. For grad students, who might find that unstructured time is more stressful than being handed a schedule, providing a concrete example and some scaffolding of how to be disciplined early on might help set them up for success as they become more independent.'

JeeSu Suh, Student Partner, McMaster University

These comments from a student partner Cherie has worked with raise issues of scaffolding, and hierarchy and power dynamics and relations. These are things we need to learn how to negotiate in research spaces: who gets access to what resources, who gets positioned where in research papers etc. There are also various considerations with respect to what is achievable in the time scale that is available to students. Often timing is limited to a summer or where students come into a project underway and ongoing after their departure from the project.

Open Discussion of benefits for engaging students in scholarship:

- What are the benefits for students and faculty?
- The members present collaborated on the benefits on a Jamboard – the comments provided are available [here](#)
- Interdisciplinary research is highly valuable in opening up and broadening perspectives. Not only do students feel really excited to understand the research in their own programs they also can learn the limits of knowledge in their disciplines. For instance, students coming together in research across disciplines (e.g. Computer Science and English Literature). These connections are invaluable and can create very generative spaces for students to be in.
- It is important to help build confidence and build clarity on the questions that students need to ask of their faculty partners. Due to the novel experience, and the privileged space they inhabit, students do not want to be perceived as not knowing or making mistakes. The Library can serve as a good resource for students who are seeking confidence and support to help them come back to their faculty partner with more confidence.
- Faculty need to role model the exploration of ideas and making this process transparent so that students can emulate it.



- Is there work that is too mundane to be assigned to a student partner or research assistant? It is difficult as a faculty member inexperienced in working with student partners to know how to approach this work. For instance, I mark up a text and then transcribe this to a computer – a student could do this transcription work but this is more of a didactic approach to a student partnership, how can we move to more of a partnership model in this scenario?
 - The more mundane/administrative tasks can be part of the partnership in that it could be used as part of the scaffolding approach: have the student do the smaller tasks and then move up to higher levels of engagement with the subject matter.

- Faculty can help students include their voices in the decision making as projects move forward.
- In the example provided in reviewing and marking up texts the student could be engaged to first transcribe, then mirror this work, then collectively review those notes.
 - For faculty teaching a minor of a program it is difficult perhaps because there is not a cohort of students to draw from.
- A key consideration is transparency – showing students the parts of the jigsaw puzzle that form inquiry in specific contexts. It may be that partnership opportunities are not possible for students in specific scenarios - there may only be work that is fairly administrative that does not seem to create a partnership.
- The benefits students have will not be the same for every partnership – but we need to be transparent about it – we can give basic data management tasks and use that opportunity to situate some smaller / bounded tasks in the context of a larger research process. This provides mentorship to students as novice researchers and builds capacity for those students.
 - It is important to be transparent on the limitations of partnerships when the work of an RA is restricted to administrative/data management
- Be open to ideas from students of other ways they can engage in the work
- Think intentionally about how you will recognize the input of the student in your work – you need to acknowledge these students in a seen way in publications and so on that come from the research done.

Partnership Approaches

- Moving from transactional didactic relationships to partnerships it is important that contributions to research be equally valued though the expertise is not the same.
- Students are heterogenous, they are different in terms of their social locations or intersectional identities and these different perspectives can be highly valuable in research
- Why do faculty look to work with students as partners in teaching and learning?
 - Students bring their lived experience. There is capacity building for students and for the faculty: students can bring their skills to the table that a faculty member may not necessarily have. The faculty partner is then in a position of learning alongside the student partner. There are issues involved in working through this that you need to be aware of as the faculty member in the partnership.
 - Faculty look for space to have different conversations with students – partnerships provide a space for these conversations to take place
 - Opportunity to get different or “better” data (for instance, students would respond differently to a student interviewing them versus a faculty researcher conducting interviews)
- Why Students want to work in partnership with faculty?
 - Shared responsibility of what happens next in research (esp. in an applied field)



- It is revealing to “see behind the curtain” of teaching. There can then be eye opening moments to the limitations imposed on faculty by institutional, classroom, resource and other constraints.
- Students often are interested in challenging traditional hierarchies and structures in the University – in being in a research partnership they can engage as legitimate knowers in the institution – this contributes to ideas of social justice in the academy
- Students are seeking to apply to grad school so the opportunities to present and/or publish work in an undergrad is valuable in those graduate applications.

Questions to Consider

- How does a partnership approach to research compare with your understanding of engaging students in research?
 - Need to build trust and ensure that clear expectations are set and that we are not creating too much pressure relating to deadlines and the different dynamics of relations between teacher/student in the classroom and teacher/student partner
 - It is important to always be upfront and have open and transparent communications about expectations
 - It is valuable to be intentional when the partnership comes to an end. It is important to have a debriefing/closing conversation at the end of a project. It is helpful to ensure clarity for the teacher and student understand why a project ended (if things are not working, if circumstances change etc.)

- What would you need to do to facilitate a partnership approach to research with students?
 - You need to ensure that you scaffold the process – do not bring the student in as a full partner at the outset – give them opportunities to build confidence as they engage in the research
 - Being mindful that working in partnership can cause timelines to take a bit longer and with the longer process it is enriched and we need to be mindful of the student trajectory and timelines.
 - There is frontloading – you need to build trust at the outset and create an open space where those in partnership feel comfortable to ask questions.

- Related considerations
 - Risk – the sense of being vulnerable and letting students see behind the curtain – for some this may be a very uncomfortable and new experience.
 - Letting go of control can also be difficult – letting students take some of this control can be difficult.

- EDI Considerations
 - Need to take into account ways to properly recognize all individuals and be mindful of social and intersectional identities and treat all equally perhaps with more deference to those who have been historically excluded/dismissed

- How to determine the authoring process?
 - There are various considerations and the principle should be to constantly check in with the student. Students may be listed as co-authors, as student authors, etc.

- When you check in with the students you can be open and transparent with how you will deal with reviews of work – this can be assigned to the lead author.
- You need to be mindful of how this and change and we are limited on the time that we have with students
- Are journals less keen to publish if there is an undergraduate student attached to an article? Do we diminish publishability of an article if we work with students in this way?
 - We need to build capacity in our students and there is growing interest in this endeavour in tri-council funding: the creation of opportunities for students in knowledge dissemination is important.
 - We need to be open and transparent about what students are looking for from the partnership. You can review the work that you would like to engage in and see what they hope to get out of it. Students are eager to learn about the process but some are also eager to have publications – so open and honest conversations are helpful.
 - It is invaluable for students to be involved in the whole process from idea to research to publication to funding.

Being and Becoming a Researcher: attending to process, centering equity

- Demystifying and making explicit the whole process
- Faculty are encouraged to refer to the [resource sheet](#)
- There are barriers and students do not have the confidence or the social or cultural capital to even approach faculty.
- Need to consider if positions are paid or unpaid and how we consider requests for accommodations
 - To address these barriers you need to consider how you talk about research processes and opportunities with students.
 - You can consider your own journey as you have these conversations with students
- You do not become a researcher overnight – it is a long process and it is valuable to share some of your experiences with your students – what were the barriers you faced, what were your failures and your successes/
- Regarding how we go about promoting a culture of Undergraduate research and co-inquiry at MRU.
 - It was useful to hear suggestions about connecting faculty across departments who are engaged in this work (and see jamboard ideas below)

